

grant programs, providing important protections for battered immigrant women, reauthorizing the domestic violence hotline, and helping State and tribal courts improve interstate enforcement of protection orders. It is especially fitting that Congress passed this crucial legislation in the month designated as Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

### **Remarks Following a Meeting With the National Security Team**

*October 12, 2000*

#### ***Situation in the Middle East/U.S.S. Cole***

**The President.** I have just been meeting with my national security team on today's tragic events in the Middle East, and I would like to make a brief statement.

First, as you know, an explosion claimed the lives of at least four sailors on one of our naval vessels, the U.S.S. *Cole*, this morning. Many were injured; a number are still missing. They were simply doing their duty. The ship was refueling in a port in Yemen while en route to the Persian Gulf. We're rushing medical assistance to the scene, and our prayers are with the families who have lost their loved ones or are still awaiting news.

If, as it now appears, this was an act of terrorism, it was a despicable and cowardly act. We will find out who was responsible and hold them accountable. If their intention was to deter us from our mission of promoting peace and security in the Middle East, they will fail utterly.

I have directed the Department of Defense, the FBI, and the State Department to send officials to Yemen to begin the investigation. Secretary Albright has spoken with President Salih of Yemen, and we expect to work closely with his government to that effect.

Our military forces and our Embassies in the region have been on heightened state of alert for some time now. I have ordered our ships in the region to pull out of port and our land forces to increase their security.

Tensions are extremely high today throughout the entire region, as all of you know. I strongly condemn the murder of Israeli soldiers in Ram Allah today. While I

understand the anguish Palestinians feel over the losses they have suffered, there can be no possible justification for mob violence. I call on both sides to undertake a cease-fire immediately and immediately to condemn all acts of violence.

Finally, let me say this. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the greatest tragedies and most difficult problems of our time. But it can be solved. The progress of the last few years—progress that brought Israel to the hope of a final peace with true security and Palestinians to the hope of a sovereign state recognized by the entire world—was not made through violence. It happened because both sides sat down together, negotiated, and slowly built up the trust that violence destroys.

Now is the time to stop the bloodshed, to restore calm, to return to dialog and ultimately to the negotiating table. The alternative to the peace process is now no longer merely hypothetical. It is unfolding today before our very eyes.

Now I need to go back to work on this, and so I won't take questions right now. But the Department of Defense will offer a briefing today and will be able to answer the questions that are relevant to today's events.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:47 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Ali Salih of Yemen.

### **Statement on Efforts To Lift Sanctions Against Serbia**

*October 12, 2000*

Today I have directed the Department of the Treasury and the Department of State to take immediate steps to begin lifting the trade and financial sanctions imposed against Serbia in 1998, except those targeted against members of the former regime. This includes lifting the oil embargo and flight ban, which will be effective immediately.

The victory of freedom in Serbia is one of the most hopeful developments in Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall. It ended a dictatorship, and it can liberate an entire region from the nagging fear that ethnic differences will again be exploited to start wars

and shift borders. Therefore, we have a strong interest in supporting Yugoslavia's newly elected leaders as they work to build a truly democratic society. Our disagreement was with the Milosevic regime, not the people of Serbia who have suffered under the regime's brutal policies.

The removal of these sanctions is a first step to ending Serbia's isolation. It is within the scope of the sanctions-lifting measure announced Monday by the European Union (EU) ministers in Luxembourg, and we will move forward in coordination with the EU. We will also ensure that such measures do not allow those supporters of Milosevic to continue the systematic theft of resources that have marked the last 13 years. In that vein, we will continue to enforce a ban on travel to the United States by top members of the Milosevic regime and keep in place measures that help the new government deter a looting of the national patrimony during the current period of transition in Yugoslavia. We will also review our restrictions on Serbia's participation in international financial institutions as Serbia makes its democratic transition and meets its international obligations.

There is still much work ahead for the Yugoslav people and their new government: restoring confidence in the rule of law, rebuilding an honest economy, accounting for the past while building a better future. Thankfully, that work can now begin—without the burden of isolation—and with the friendship of the American people.

### **Statement on Signing the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles**

*October 12, 2000*

I am pleased today to sign the instrument of ratification for the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles. This treaty is the first international agreement dedicated solely to raising standards for the protection of sea turtles.

All six species of sea turtle found in the Western Hemisphere are threatened or en-

dangered, some critically so. The extensive migration patterns of these majestic creatures span thousands of miles in both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Consequently, effective conservation measures depend on close international cooperation. This treaty fosters that cooperation and serves as a model for others focused on conserving the world's most endangered species.

This Convention also demonstrates that countries can work together to protect marine life, and that our trade and environment policies can be mutually supportive. I commend the Senate for giving its advice and consent to ratification of this important agreement.

### **Statement on Hate Crimes Legislation**

*October 12, 2000*

Today marks 2 years since young Matthew Shepard was beaten unconscious, tied to a fence, and left to die. At the time of Matthew's death, I expressed my sympathy for the family and my outrage about the heinous nature of the crime. Since then, Matthew's death has been a call to action to many across the country committed to doing more to prevent and prosecute hate crimes. Many have worked tirelessly, along with my administration, to pass meaningful hate crimes legislation this year. Their efforts led to two strong bipartisan votes—one in the House and one in the Senate—in favor of hate crimes legislation. Unfortunately, just last week, the Republican leadership—denying the will of a bipartisan majority in both the House and the Senate—stripped hate crimes legislation from the Department of Defense Authorization bill. This action is wrong, and the will of the majority should be respected. We must not let the fear of people different from ourselves prevent this legislation from passing. Working with the bipartisan coalition that supports hate crimes legislation, I will continue to fight to make sure this important work gets done.